

# WESTERN PEOPLE

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**FOR THE FUN OF IT**

**THE MORTLACH FIDDLERS**



# WESTERN PEOPLE

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## 3 Memory

— Helen Lavender remembers her grandfather.

## 4



## Cover Story

— Profile of the Mortlach Fiddlers.

## 6

## History

— The Old Gang, a group of Keithville homesteaders, got together annually for more than 40 years.

## 9

## Harvest Memory

— Harvesting at night has its share of spills and chills for Beth MacDonald.

## 10



## History

— The Viscount Baseball Club was a diamond in the rough.

## 11

## Poetry

— "Harvesting in the '30s," by Cy Young.

## 12

## Travel

— What are travel agents good for? Lots of things.

## 13

## Garden Chat

— Bugs that are partial to apples.

## 15

## Puzzles and Mailbox

## Loving The Dirt

(To Pat)

The last carrot has been pulled and the potatoes wait to be dug up. The final trace of warm air passed over this plot of earth many days ago.

A woman takes a break from her labor of love and stands back to reflect upon her garden plot.

She accepts the autumn avalanche of dry leaves from a nearby tree while dismissing the notion of winter for now, loving the dirt on her hands.

Her palms rub the harvest of life.

— Ronald Kurt

## COVER PHOTO

Haldon Hodgins, one of the Mortlach Fiddlers. Photo by Karen Morrison. Story, page 4.

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## Dear Reader

It all began innocently enough. I was in the back yard sitting in one of those white plastic chairs that are so . . . *je ne sais crois* . . . watching the cats gambol in pursuit of butterflies and grasshoppers. They were, as usual, tethered via longish ropes to a metal ring screwed into the ground pursuant to city bylaw No. whatever (but that's another story) when one of the tethers became wrapped around a tree, as happens approximately every 25 seconds, pursuant to the Cat Law of Back Yard Dynamics.

I rose from the white plastic *je ne sais crois* to attend to this

matter, when, for no apparent reason, something went *sproing* in my back. A stabbing pain ensued, followed by a cold, clammy feeling and a sense of lightheadedness (not the happy kind). There would be no disentanglement of cats at this point. There would be only the slow and painful descent back into the *je ne sais crois* and the wait for the general malaise to lift, followed by a slow hobble to the indoors and a lying-down place.

Every time this happens (infrequently, luckily) I am reminded what a useful apparatus the back really is. When it is well-oiled and humming along, we think nothing of using it to lift heavy

boxes of *National Geographic*s, make twisting catches of Frisbees, carry children by piggy-back, throw crabapples over the fence, or bend down to tie shoelaces. When it's caught in the grip of some ineluctable demon force that jams up its gears and pulleys, there is little relief to be found, beyond liberal applications of Scotch. Eventually it "gets better."

Which proves what? I guess it proves I would be a disappointing torture subject. Hey, hey, hey, what does he have in mind with that red-hot needle? Why is he looking at me like that? If he comes any closer, I'll have to . . . [faint].

Michael Gillgannon

WESTERN PEOPLE



## When Grandpa called the tune

He comes back to me whenever I hear a fiddle play, sometimes when I just see a picture of one. The top of his grizzled grey head appears within a dark doorway. The soft strains of a waltz played on a fiddle, his waltz on his fiddle, float through my head. I feel beneath me the firmness of the hard wooden bench where we sat beside his shack door near Styal, Alberta, each evening for two summers.

Each of us hurried our chores to be first out and nearest the door and closest to his music. As we sat side by side, it felt as if the notes tiptoed through my eight-year-old head to my brother's and little sister's. They may have lost something in the transfer,

for they could never keep her as still, as enthralled, as they did the two of us.

The smell of his pipe filled the shack in the same way the steamy new earth smell was contained under the glass lid of Mother's cold-frame where it protected her young tomato, cabbage and cauliflower plants into their adolescence.

In each case the pent-up particles inside got up and marched out into the surrounding air when the opportunity presented itself. No matter how deeply I breathed, I could never collect enough of either wonderful scent. Such glorious perfumes.

But Grandpa Keiver Hunter was so much more than sound and scent. His eyes were the deepest, clearest blue — the kind I associate with honesty. The smile-wrinkles at the corners of his eyes were designed to match perfectly the gentle ones that never quite left the corners of his mouth.

Only the bushy white eyebrows that would jump up and down at his command, ever brought any concern that he might scold or show annoyance or impatience. I just knew he had never been really angry, ever.

But enthralling as the after-supper concert

was, the moment that held me in suspense and suspension was the last moment of our short visit—the firm, gentle hug for each with the gift of his approving smile, before we skipped across the narrow yard to the kitchen and through to bed for the night.

Each night that last summer, a bit of that waltz had somehow become trapped inside my head and some of that smoky scent had clung to my hair, and the warmth of that hug continued to enwrap me. When I closed my eyes, those honest blue eyes gently watched over me.

I tried not to think of the day when he would move away for the winter again and I forced myself not to let the truth creep inside my cold-frame of protection. No. I could not acknowledge even having heard it discussed. I had come to love this grand old man of the past two summers so much.

I refused to picture the time ahead when his fiddle, his pipe, those eyes and those hugs would be ours no more. I loved him so much and hated the terrible threat that was said to be a part of him. He couldn't, he just couldn't possibly have cancer. He couldn't possibly be going to die.

It was Mother—his daughter-in-law—who helped when the letter came from Auntie Eva, saying he would not last the week. Mom called us all to her and told us gently. And she cried with Dad and with all of us in a great circle hug. For many days, we were encouraged to talk about him, remember the things about him that mat-

tered to us and make peace with the inevitability of his death.

When that news came, it was as if the sadness was one large load rather than our separate individual burdens. With each of us taking a good grip at the sides of it and lifting together, we were able to carry it. I think we learned that year that a load shared is never quite as heavy as individual loads when each is left to carry them alone. ■

*(Helen Lavender of Sherwood Park, Alta. keeps busy recording family memories.)*







# Give me that old time music

Left to right: Walter Cumming, Haldon Hodgins, Jack Brownlee, Arnold Torgerson, Allan Schmidt, Vernon Rowe.

## *The Mortlach Fiddlers have been around for a long time—and a good time*

Story & photos by Karen Morrison

**T**heir average age is 78; their hair is white, grey, receding or all three. The musical ensemble does more than 100 gigs a year and has just taped its eighth recording in 18 years. Farmers and longtime friends who got together in retirement to make music, they are the Mortlach Fiddlers, immortalized in a handsome 15-foot high sign at the village entrance.

"Welcome to Mortlach—home of the Mortlach Fiddlers," it tells the traffic screaming by on the Trans-Canada Highway between Moose Jaw and Swift Current, Sask.

"I'm the big mouth," said fiddler Haldon Hodgins, 86, of his role as leader.

He does the bookings and hosts rehearsals, recording sessions and lunches in his basement.

"It's been some of the best years of my life playing with these fellows," said Hodgins.

He and fellow fiddlers Vernon Rowe, 86, Elwood Peterson, 70, and Walter Cumming, 84, are original members; banjo player Jack Brownlee, 75, and fiddler Arnold Torgerson joined more recently. At just 63, bass guitarist Allen Schmidt is the new guy.

Schmidt plays with other groups as does Peterson, a church organist. Both are single. "I never had time to go chase women, that's why I'm a bachelor," said Schmidt, known also for extraordinary talents in the garden.

The fiddlers have received numerous

accolades for their volunteer work over the years, the grandest perhaps from the community in 1999, with a gala in the local hall for the unveiling of the highway sign. Some, like Hodgins, have also picked up a few awards along the way in solo classes.

His father made his first fiddle when Hodgins was just five, and it hangs now on the basement wall. Torgerson remembers starting to play around the same age, despite family fears he would drop their precious violin.

A teacher encouraged his playing and invited him to perform at a school concert, and the love affair grew. The others picked up the violin again in their retirement after fiddling fingers had remained idle for many years.

Their membership has changed over



the years due to health, deaths and retirements, but the group has always counted between six and nine players.

Brown tones and patterns predominate in the expansive Hodgins basement where they have spent so many years playing, recording their music and sharing their lives.

Decked out in matching brown vests and cravats and tan pants, they play at local gatherings like wedding anniversaries and events at seniors' centres. They don't charge and at best break even, with sales of their recordings now numbering around 10,000.

"If we were in it for the money, we would have quit after six months," said Hodgins, who like Peterson, once played in bands for hire. "We've got a lot of satisfaction from just playing as we do."

"I thought I was well paid," said Rowe of their appreciative audiences: "A smile a mile wide, that's all I needed."

"If you know you're giving them a lift, that gives us a lift," added Hodgins.

All members have seen how patients and shut-ins respond to music. One woman spouts gibberish in ordinary conversation but sings songs clearly when they play, said Torgerson.

Their appeal, members say, comes from playing the tunes people grew up with in rural Canada. — the schottische, waltzes and tunes like "Springtime in the Rockies."

They have at least 200 songs in their repertoire

"If anyone asked for a song and they don't know it, they'll know it the next time they play," said Marion Rowe, Vernon's wife. The spouses have always been an integral part of "the fiddle family."

"Who do you think keeps their shirts clean?" she asked.

Spouses join them at most of the gigs, help make lunch and visit with patients. "We wouldn't have so good a life without fiddling," said Marion.

Practices are rare, but usually occur

leading up to an album recording session. "We practice when we go to [seniors'] homes," said Hodgins, to raucous laughter from the men. Hodgins said many members learned to play by ear, so that makes it easy to pick up any tune. "If you know a piece, you can play it."

Cumming and Hodgins read music; the rest learned to play by ear.

Generally the amiable Peterson, "our anchor," starts them off and the rest just follow. Peterson, a smile creased into his face, also leads them in a steady flow of puns and banter. "If there wasn't humor, well it would be a pretty boring world," is how he looks at it.

As their members have changed, so have the instruments and their sound. A member originally from the Philippines, Bennie Mercado, brought a Hawaiian flavor to the group with his electric guitar. Others, like Margaret Garner and Peterson have played the accordion. One of

their recordings even includes vocals by Torgerson, Peterson and Hodgins.

To further spread the fiddle gospel, they launched an annual fiddle jamboree at nearby Besant Park in 1982. "The old folks paradise" attracts 20 bands and 5,000 fiddle enthusiasts for a week-end each July.

Schmidt thinks there will always be demand for old-time music: "Where are you going to find a 80-year-old rock 'n' roll band to go into seniors homes?"

Health is a factor though; Peterson spent some time in hospital earlier this year. Cumming, fiddling since age 11, lost three fiddling fingers in a post pounder accident on his left hand.



Elwood Peterson, the band's "anchor," keeps them laughing.



"What I do with four fingers, he does with two, he makes them do," said Hodgins of his old friend.

They are always looking for younger players and plan their future from month to month, knowing "the writing is on the wall" for the very senior ensemble.

"We keep going because we love to play. We'll go as long as health permits," Hodgins concludes to the others' mumbled chorus of, "God willing and health permitting." ■



Walter Cumming





Some members of the Old Gang of pioneer settlers in the Keithville district of Saskatchewan. They organized a reunion every year from 1923 to 1966.

# The Old Gang

History by Jan Williams-Russell

I pick up my grandpa Tommy Williams' old black binder, labelled with a piece of adhesive tape, "Records of the Old Gang." The yellowed pages with tattered edges extend beyond the confines of the covers. Inside, neatly written on linen-like paper, are the names of 23 members of the Old Gang. Hand-drawn pencil lines connect two columns, the list of names and a column titled "Eats."

The first page is the record of the Nov. 8, 1932 reunion of the Old Gang at the home of William Smith; a P for present beside the name of those who attended. Near the bottom is the name of a guest, James Greenblat. Alongside each name in the Eats column is an item of food they are expected to bring to the upcoming supper.

Although the binder was meant to be a record of the annual supper reunion of a group of 23 men who homesteaded in the Keithville district of Saskatchewan around 1909, it is also a glimpse at how the lives of these pioneers unfolded and the world they lived in. The pioneering spirit that

brought these men from diverse parts of the world to the Canadian Prairies, was also the tie that bound them together, for life.

In 1923, Ed Qualle suggested an annual reunion of the Keithville old-timers gang to ensure they would keep in touch. The idea took off and each year they would meet at one of the member's homes.

Clarence C. Potter reminisces in a letter, "I well remember the first meeting we had at Ed Qualle's, and I remember Jack Martin telling about losing his biscuits that he had baked so carefully and sat out to cool and along come those Hound-Dogs of Rasmussons and stole the whole bunch of them. It always made me feel sorry for the loss of his time and bread."

Keithville, named by the post office, was the area north of Pennant, which was later renamed Ohioville by local residents since a number of settlers had immigrated from Ohio. At the time these men homesteaded there was no railway and no village. The railway reached the area in 1911 and Pennant was established in 1912.

Greenblat, a, reporter for the Swift

Current Sun, was invited to the 1932 reunion. "Hopped off the train at Pennant and drove out to William (Billy) Smith's farm with B.M. (Bryan) Hill, Dan Gaunt and Russ Wright. As we drove up alongside the kitchen door, we were met with great whoopees and the smell of roasting chicken and turkey. What an introduction.

"In the kitchen, what a sight! Billy Smith with an apron on, stirring luscious gravy; Tommy Williams carving a big gobbler; Hubert Stutsman grimly trying to hold his appetite in check; brother Claudy Stutsman tasting homemade pickles; Alf Bye Sr. trembling with hungry emotion; Alf Bye Jr. looking for guidance; Ab Smith bringing to light his old granite plate and homesteader cup; Jim Thompson with glistening eyes ogling some cranberry pie; Ab Watson trying to look busy; Bill Martin trying to look calm; George Purvis talking politics; Fred Honey quiet but determined.

"And the big range sent waves of heat over the kitchen and the waves smacked of food, good old country food. What a milling in the kitchen; what a shaking of hands and backslaps.



Boy, what a stag party! Soon the zero hour approached and all hands raced for the tables in the big dining room. Depression? Maybe; but eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow is another day."

Social events held in people's homes were a common feature of rural life as was a big chicken dinner with the neighbors. What was unique about this dinner was the significance of this gathering to the men involved. It was the social highlight of the year, every year from 1923 to 1966. Like other groups of people who have lived through difficult times or events, they had come to rely on one another and trusted that these friends would always be there when they were needed most. The life-long bond forged in home-steading days was to remain strong the rest of their lives.

The Old Gang was also a benevolent society for its members. Williams kept financial records in the old binder. The gang always kept money on hand to buy a wreath and send condolences to a bereaved family when one of the Old Gang passed on. A yearly one dollar contribution from each member maintained that fund.

In February 1947, G. R. (George) Hart addressed a letter to Hill, "Dear Oldtimer" telling of a meeting of the club "to discuss what we could do in regard to helping Ab Watson, who has recently lost his house and contents by fire. It was decided that each member donate \$5 for the cause."

The reply on the returned letter written in pencil by Hill describes it as "a fine idea. One never knows when or how bad luck will strike any one of us after all that is what friends are for."

Each fall, Williams, the secretary-treasurer of the gang, would send out invitations to those who no longer lived in the district. The polite replies would arrive from far away members along with the wistful longing to be there.

Hill, in his 1944 letter, says "I'll make a special effort to be there. I've sold my car so will have to come by bus." Later, writing Oct. 31, 1949 from Vancouver, Hill replies: "Unfortunately it will be impossible for me to attend but I do want you and The Old Gang to know that I will be thinking of them especially on that evening and at 6 o'clock . . . I'll give a special yahoo. So please

tell the boys though I'm not with them in person, I'm certainly there in my thoughts."

By 1953, he was still with the Old Gang but still at a distance. His letter starts, "This is the day and I'd sure like to be with you. You notice the time I'm writing this, you'll be just sitting down to a good old feed, not only of food but of old memories, yes, I can see you all there, just about a dozen but all of



Thomas and Mary (Smith) Williams, 1915.

them my friends . . . Although I live out here you're still my kind of people. So long Tommy, yours truly, B.M."

Member Potter of Grants Pass, Ore. wanted to be a part of the celebration also. Each year he would type a long letter with details of his life, his hobbies and the world around him. Sometimes a toast for the meal would arrive in the mail or a gift for the members; wooden salt and pepper shakers or a redwood bowl he had made on his lathe.

In 1939, the last year of his life, he wrote to the gang saying he could no longer do his wood work. "We are sending a box with a vase, made from Mountain Laurel, or Madrona, with flowers that won't wilt for quite some time. I would like for you to place them in the centre of the table when you banquet that night, I will bequeath this

bunch of flowers to be used as long as you like in the years to come, you can just remember me by them."

He knew his days were waning and he finished off the letter with a typically prairie comment on the weather. "We shure have a fine climate ( in Oregon), I am quite shure I have lived years longer than I would have had I stayed there in that cold climate. Now I will close and wish one and all of you many more pleasant meeting days. Respt, C.C. Potter."

It was even more frustrating for those who lived closer but could still not attend this big occasion. Russ L. Wright, living in Balgonie, Sask. in 1940 schemed about how to get to the supper. "I would almost give an eye-tooth to be with you and the rest of the boys at the Old Gang Get-together when they meet with you on the 20th of this month. The passing of each year at our age seems to mean much more to each of us than when we were younger and in my getting around the country I realize more and more each year that old friends are the very best friends and I truly do miss these get-togethers. . .

"Give my very best regards to each and every member of the gang when you are together that night and I can assure you that I will be with all of you in spirit if not in person. Yours very truly, Russ."

At first, the reunions were for the men only, but in later years wives were included. Alcohol was never a part of the feast. The dinner was similar to a fall supper, always with chicken on the menu and sometimes turkey or goose. Some of the men were bachelors, others were widowers or living alone so the big meal was anticipated with gusto. "I will certainly think of you eating chicken, turkey, gravy and mashed potatoes, with pie and cake to spare, while we get macaroni and cheese," writes Pte. Alf S. Bye Jr. on Nov. 10, 1940 from Toronto, while training with the South Saskatchewan Regiment.

"I sincerely hope that Ab Smith breaks himself in easily this year, instead of starving for a week before the supper as he did in former years, and then eating so much he had to be rolled on the floor to get him back in shape."





Thomas Williams eliminated some hand labor by buying harrows, a plow and a binder. Unfortunately, the year he did so, there was a crop failure.

George R. Hart also mentions Smith in his 1951 reply: "See that Ab's pants button around him before supper." His 1952 response to the invitation advises: "Hope you all have a nice evening, Tell the boys to all use discretion. Hope there will be no casualty from over indulgence, over my not being there to do my part."

The annual letters responding to the invitation also contain stories of incidents that happened in the early days. They had endured hard times, drought and prairie fires, grasshoppers and crop failures, blizzards, flu epidemics, deaths of family members and survival with meagre means. Potter recalls the story of Ab Smith digging a well for Hill and "walking [30 miles] to Swift to get damamite and then the well was a fizzle. That was a tough experience."

"I am so glad you that have stayed by your homesteads have been rewarded with a good crop this year. Drouth, Hoppers, & wind for lo these several years, And still you have stayed by it, You certainly deserve the break that's come now. The Old Gang is passing, some have gone on, others are fast fading, I often think of the old days, for that's all I can do any more."

Through the letters, mostly handwritten, the men commented on world events, the Depression and the war years. R. L. Wright living in Moose Jaw in the 1930s writes: "Regret that I am to advise you that I cannot see my

way clear to accept your most kind invitation to be among those present. I am at present a member of the great army of unemployed and I feel that I should conserve my few assets until I hook up with a salary cheque once more."

Potter in the United States in 1939 writes: "The morning headlines with big black letters Hitler, Nazi, his Subs sinking battleships, etc. The radio with its special late bulletin Hitler, subs sinking more ships and so on till one wonders what it's all about. Well we are glad our Mr. President has his embargo lifted, I would love to live to see the day Hitler has to saw wood for a living, or go back to his paper hanging."

While in 1940, Bye Jr. in the Canadian army writes: "I do not find the drill hard to learn, nor the army regulations irksome. However the waiting and uncertainty is . . . I have an idea that we are scheduled to push Jerry out of France next spring sometime and you old army men know what that means. Our Canadian training is now complete, and we are ready and anxious to go overseas, to the front (as soon as they get one). We have fair equipment, and real good officers, and have every confidence in our ability to maintain the reputation that our men built up for the Canadians in the last war."

He writes from England in 1942: "I do wish we could land a few hundred million bushels of our good Canadian wheat over here. Our bread is the best."

Back to the 1932 reunion, Greenblat

observes: "The food has miraculously disappeared. Groans."

Then come the stories of the old homestead days. The "boys go into barber shop harmony. Each take part in the program while clouds of smoke from blackened briars and cigarettes make dusk the upper strata. Tom Graham is indisposed at home. They group around the telephone in the kitchen and Tom, miles away hears them huskily and sentimentally sing Old Black Joe. Thus it goes on for hours. More homestead stories. It's 3 o'clock in the morning. On goes the coffee. More food. It's 4 o'clock in the morning, but shucks, who cares; once a year for good old Keithville."

At the last meeting, Nov., 12, 1966, the Old Gang met in Swift Current with Jim Thompson serving as host. There were eight of the original members present, six wives and a guest.

The fellowship of singing together was a feature of the reunions. In the old black binder is a carbon-copy of a song. The chorus repeats: "Saskatchewan our own" and is perhaps an apt description of the Old Gang.

*"We love thee our Saskatchewan  
And choose thee for our own,  
For many a woman, man and child,  
You make a happy home.  
May tyrants hand ne'er rule in thee.  
Nor desolation come,  
Saskatchewan our own."* ■



# Things that go sloorp in the night

Memory by Beth MacDonald

**T**he night was cold and dark. The moon and any stars that might have made the night sky a magical tapestry had been obliterated by heavy dark clouds. We had moved to the old Beaumont farm, and with rain threatening, we determined to work as late as we could in an attempt to get off as much wheat as possible.

But it never seemed to fail. We always combined on this farm after dark. And now here we were again, right on cue, a long convoy of combine, grain truck, half-ton and auger jolting and shuddering their way up the old rutted lane to start another field. As if in sympathy, the wind moaned as it tossed and swirled the leaves about and sent the long grasses swaying and twisting in the headlights.

The vacant old two-storey house, although perfectly benign in the sunshine, seemed to take on a sinister character at night with its black gaping windows frowning down on me. But, by far the worst, was the old drive shed with its open front, slowly sinking into the ground right beside the bin we were filling.

The yard at one time must have been quite pretty with its huge poplar trees and stately oaks. But now these trees were dying and tonight their broken limbs, scraping and grinding against each other, were sending forth the most eerie groans and cries into the darkness.

While I took the combine and started on the outside round, Wilbert, my husband, set up the auger and the hopper and positioned the logs we used as markers for backing up to the hopper. He filled the auger with gas, checked

the bin and opened the roof cap. All was ready.

The auger was a cantankerous old thing and the starter didn't work anymore. We had to pull on the long drive



File photo

belt—and I do mean pull. It seemed to be running fine so he headed out to the field to switch places with me.

He didn't quite trust me after dark. I was much better off in the truck, he said. I had a heater in the cab for warmth and a flashlight to see that I didn't spill any grain on the ground. All I had to do was back the truck in, start the auger and lift the hoist.

Sitting on the edge of the field, I saw my husband flash the combine lights. That was my signal. The hopper was full. I flashed my own lights in response and followed the trail of straw around the field to the combine. I pulled alongside, picked up my load and headed back to the yard.

I swung up in front of the old drive shed, pulled out into the long grass and backed up to the auger. Wrapping my coat around me tightly for warmth, I stepped gingerly through the tall grass.

I grabbed hold of the belt on the

auger and gave a quick pull. Nothing. Another, and yet another. Finally it coughed and took off with a great roar. Lifting the tailgate, I stood with my back to the old drive shed, my flashlight trained on the hopper, and watched as the grain poured in and was quickly ushered up the pipe and into the bin.

Suddenly, something slapped me across the back and wrapped itself around my shoulders. Every hair on my head shot straight up. Pure terror seized hold of me and I could not move. I stood frozen to the spot waiting for the next blow.

Finally my mind jolted into action as I realized that my feet were buried in grain. I reached out automatically and slammed down the end gate on the truck, and fearing the worst, spun around to

confront "whatever."

The auger engine was screaming full blast and as I moved to shut it off, I tripped over something in the grass. Afraid, yet frantic to know what it was, I aimed the flashlight downward. There on the ground by my feet, coiled and twisted lay the long black drive belt from the auger.

With rubbery knees and pounding heart, I picked it up and made my way through the long tangled grass to shut off that infernal racket.

With shaking hands, I cranked the engine back on the frame to give a little slack, put the belt back on the pulley and finished the job. Heading back out to the field, the lights on the combine flashed off, then on again. He was full.

I whispered a prayer as I pulled in alongside the combine. Next year, Lord, please, let us combine this place in daylight. ■





The Viscount Baseball Club, 1911. Joe Marcoux is behind the printed "BBC" and Bill Marcoux is right behind him.

# Diamonds in the rough

History by Keith Moen

**T**heir faces and figures, which are etched in a photograph nearing a century in age, represent an era of a bygone time — a time long before the advent of computers, the adoption of mass communication or electricity, and even before the infiltration of automobiles as the transportation mode of choice.

The picture of the 1911 Viscount baseball club is among the most recent inductions into the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame, located in Battleford, Sask.

The induction and donation of the picture resulted from the efforts of Grant Marcoux, a retired farmer from the Viscount area now living in Saskatoon. His father, Joe, and uncle, Bill, are among the nine players in the picture.

Marcoux had the original picture, which was little more than a personal memento until he came upon some

valuable information.

While perusing a history book outlining the first 100 years of the Saskatoon Exhibition, Marcoux recalled a passage from that book: "The first organized baseball tournament was held in 1909. There were two to four games on each day of the exhibition. The winning team was from Viscount."

Marcoux contacted the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame about donating his photograph. It readily accepted the chance to display a blown-up image of the team, measuring four feet wide.

Marcoux, 80, recalls many of his father's stories regarding the team. Consistent throughout each of these stories is a love for the game of baseball.

How else could you explain Joe and Bill Marcoux walking or running the six miles one way just for a baseball practice? Or their team's resolve to pitch tents in 1909 just to play at the Saskatoon Exhibition tournament, the

highlight of the baseball year?

With 50 miles between Saskatoon and their homesteads, no one on the Viscount team could afford the time or demands that a commute would require. No one could afford rented accommodations. Their only choice was to stay in tents in Saskatoon until they were eliminated from tournament play.

"They didn't have much money then," Marcoux said. "Dad said they pitched tents on the exhibition grounds — they lived in tents and ate pretty skimpy. But they could play ball."

The Viscount team let little get in their way of dominating that first tournament. Not even the jeering and cat-calls from the fans who were ridiculing the team's attire, which often was the coveralls used while working their land. Little stopped the team from enjoying their favorite pastime.

"As the week went along the booing



and the laughing came to a stop," Marcoux said. "Because [the Viscount team] let their play speak for themselves and people soon realized that these boys could play ball."

Marcoux said that the team was one that jelled quickly, mainly because most of the players had baseball experience, gained in their native United States. It was only fate and irony that brought all of these transplanted Americans — from Iowa, North Dakota, Minnesota and elsewhere — together in the Viscount area.

The team, which also included Bill Marcoux, John Bloch and Hank and Frank Wolf, stayed together for several years and earned many memories.

"The year was 1919, the Year of the Cyclone," Marcoux related. "They were coming back from Humboldt, had played in a tournament there, and had gotten as far as the Glynfield district, north of Plunkett, and the wind and the rain was terrific.

"Hank Wolfe had an Overland Buick and it had one of these open-air tops on it," Marcoux said. "They thought they'd better stop at this farmer's place because things were getting out of hand. They didn't realize a cyclone was just around the corner.

"So they pulled up to the house and the two ladies who were with them ran into the house. The four men decided to stay in the Overland and hold the roof down. Dad said he looked up and there went the house, and next thing the wind turned the car right around."

No one was injured during the destructive summer storm, although they witnessed uprooted trees and tree trunks impaled by wheat straw,

Marcoux's father was a reputable and feared pitcher whose feats and subsequent coaching accomplishments earned him posthumous induction into the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame in 1988.

He and teammate Hank Wolfe were invited to play with the Govan team in a tournament by Clarence Campbell, who would later become the commissioner of the National Hockey League. The tournament was a high point, with Marcoux pitching to Wolfe in the final and earning the home side a victory.

The prize money was good: \$200 at the 1927 Viscount Fair Days, and \$400 at the Luseland tournament in 1947.

Marcoux is no stranger to the Saskatchewan Baseball Hall of Fame himself, having earned an induction in 1997. He played for Viscount in the Thirties and Forties, until his war service with the air force began.

He said part of the reason he undertook this project was to recognize the need for funding at the Hall of Fame. Donations and pledges are being accepted for a proposed expansion/renovation that would ease overcrowding at the facility.

Marcoux is delighted that the picture, a longtime personal treasure, will now be shared with the fans of Saskatchewan baseball. "It's a tribute to the entire community of Viscount," he said. ■

## Harvesting in the '30s

You'd like to hear about harvesting in the 30s?

Well . . .

first start thinking of bologna  
and more bologna.

Think of great brown-red balloons of bologna,  
of dirty faded oilcloth on the table,  
of fly-stained kitchen,  
of old, grey-brown dish water,  
scum grease on the top —  
waiting for the heat to burst it into worms.

Think of kernels of ripe, hard wheat, tough, weathered,  
gristled.

Golden haired, whiskered, pig-bristled wheat.

Think of the land,

the fat grain stalks bursting from the land.

Think of grease bursting from a frying sausage,  
the earth turned back,

the skin cut,

the meat bursting out.

The earth,

frying in the heat,

its skin splitting in the sun.

Think of the stolid Scotsman.

Threshing boss,

God of the fields!

And the farmer.

Poor.

Furrow-browed,

hand bandaged (poor bugger! He'd nearly cut off his  
fingers in the

combine — checking to see if the Scot had too much  
wheat blowing  
through to the chaff pile).

Eating his bologna with the rest of us.

Thinking of the cost of the threshing foreman,

of the threshing gang,

the cost of the fat, girdled bologna,

red slice after red slice going down dry, red throats,

noisily,

disappearing

like stubble

blackening into earth under the disc and plow

after the harvest.

— Cy Young



# WHY USE A TRAVEL AGENT?

By Robin and Arlene Karpan

**T**he sales pitch by travel agencies used to be "Let us take care of the hassles of arranging your trip. Our services are free."

Travel agents earned their income from commissions paid by airlines, tour companies and hotels. You would pay the same if you bought your ticket from a travel agency or directly from the airline.

Things have changed. The problem began when airlines slashed the commissions they pay travel agencies. While 10 per cent used to be the norm, the airlines now pay up to five per cent and impose a ceiling for each ticket. Many travel agencies found it difficult to make ends meet, so they began charging fees to customers. The sales pitch of the travel agencies is now "value-added service." They argue that the extra cost is worth it because they are in the best position to find you the lowest fare and provide the expertise to make your trip worry free.

How much you pay depends on the agency, where you live, and what service you need. National chains may have a fee range, with the decision on what to charge left up to each manager. According to Ed Buchholz, president of Uniglobe Carefree Travel in Saskatoon, the most common fee charged by travel agents is for processing airline tickets. In Saskatoon, you can expect to pay anywhere from \$15 to \$30 for this service, but if you live

in Calgary or Vancouver, Buchholz said the cost could be as high as \$50 per ticket because of higher operating costs.

Sherry Huntley, travel manager of the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA) in Saskatoon, indicated that they held out as long as they could before implementing fees last

December. As the CAA is a membership organization, there is a two-tier fee structure depending on whether or not you are a CAA member. But even within the CAA network, there are variations.

AMA Travel in Edmonton waives many fees for members, but charges them for those who are not members of the Alberta

Motor Association.

Agencies may charge for other services such as obtaining tickets using frequent flyer points, issuing rail tickets, booking car rentals or hotels or obtaining visas. Fairly new is a "plan-to-go" deposit or consultation fee for complicated travel arrangements involving a lot of time and research. You might expect to pay a non-refundable deposit of \$50 to \$100 depending on the complexity of your itinerary. The fee is also an incentive for customers to work with one agent rather than shopping around. Many agencies do not charge fees for charter flights, tour packages or cruise bookings, as these have different commission rates.

While most agencies charge for services, a few don't. Winnipeg-based Discount Travel Warehouse, for example, has

stuck to its no-fee policy. President Peter Garagin indicated that since the bulk of their business is holiday packages and charters, the commissions they make here compensate for reduced commissions they receive from airlines and other suppliers. Many travel agencies look down on discounters as being less professional or less service oriented. But this is unfair, according to Garagin, who argues that they use the same computer systems, have the same access to travel information, and have the same expertise as any other agency.

So is there a way around travel agent service fees? Yes, if you're willing to do more of the work yourself by contacting airlines, tour operators and hotels. But you have to be prepared to spend a lot of time researching fares and arrangements on the internet or by phone.

So you have to assess how much your time is worth and the extent to which you are willing to put up with the hassles. Airlines in particular have a nasty habit of keeping you on hold forever while you wait for "the next available agent."

The world of travel agent fees is certainly not straightforward. A phrase we heard a lot from agents is that "fees may be charged" for this or that. So far at least, there doesn't seem to be across-the-board standard fees that everyone uses. The best bet is to talk to a travel agent before you start planning your trip and find out up front exactly what fees will be charged so that you can better decide if you are getting value for your travel dollar. ■





## BUGS THAT LIKE APPLES

By Sara Williams

"Picking up all early-dropped fruit every few days and feeding it to hogs will destroy many of the larvae before they have left the apples."— C.L. Metcalf, 1962

If this was about biotechnology, adding protein to fruit might be taken as cutting-edge genetic engineering or a major breakthrough in feeding a rapidly over-populating world. But the presence of worms in apples is more likely to evoke a sudden change in body language in a gardener, a stiffening resolve to gear up to destroy the culprit.

Three types of insect larvae are commonly found in apples in late summer and early fall, albeit almost always in small numbers and generally in isolated pockets of the Prairies.

They share a number of traits. All are deposited as eggs by caring mothers on the newly developing fruit. In the course of feeding, they leave tell-tale trails. They all fall (or are picked!) within the apples in autumn, overwintering either within the apple or in the soil nearby, ready to begin their life cycle again the following spring.

The apple curculio is a reddish-brown insect about 1/10 of an inch long, similar to a weevil with a long nose and a humped back. The adults feed on the buds, fruit spurs and terminal shoots — if you place a sheet or tarp below and shake the branches, they fall to the ground and "play dead."

Curculios begin to lay eggs shortly after petal fall and con-

tinue for about a month afterwards. They leave a dimple or cluster of puncture marks on the skin of the apple where the eggs were deposited. Fruit may be misshapen, under-sized or drop prematurely. The egg hatches into a tiny white legless larvae that makes its way to the core of the apple, leav-

ing a trail of narrow light brown streaks within the flesh. Once in the core, they eat the developing seeds.

They pupate within the apple, emerging as adult beetles after the fruit has fallen to the ground and overwinter in the nearby soil.

The apple seed chalcid is a very, very tiny winged wasp that infests the seeds of apples. The adults lay eggs in developing fruit in mid-June. Upon hatching, the larvae tunnel to the core where they feed inside seeds. Small brown trails through the flesh indicate their route. They remain within the fruit, even after it falls to the ground, overwinter still within the core, and emerge as adults in the spring.

Adult Apple maggots, also called railroad worms because of the numerous twisting tunnels they leave within the fruit, resemble small dark house flies. They lay eggs in the developing fruit in June and July. The larvae tunnel within the flesh of the apple. Like the apple curculio, they fall to the ground within the fruit in autumn but soon exit to pupate in the soil.

If you've come across one of these insects this fall, chances are they'll be around next spring unless you do something to interrupt their life

cycle. Begin this fall by collecting all of the fruit remaining on the tree or fallen to the ground. (If you have no hogs, destroy or send the infested apples to the landfill. Putting them in the compost pile merely provides them with an Arizona-like winter.) The apple seed chalcid will remain within the fruit until next spring while the apple maggots and curculios will overwinter in the nearby soil. Remove as much leaf litter and debris as possible to eliminate habitat. Then cultivate as late in the fall as possible to bring pupal cases and adults to the soil surface where they'll be more vulnerable to winter cold.

Next spring, spray with an insecticide containing permethrin (such as Ambush) either before the flowers open (while the adult insects, if present, are feeding on the foliage) or after the petals fall until the end of June (while the adults are laying eggs). Do not spray while the apples are in flower. You will kill the bees and other pollinating insects, eliminating fruit entirely. As for the loss of protein — I've always preferred a chunk of cheese with an apple. ■



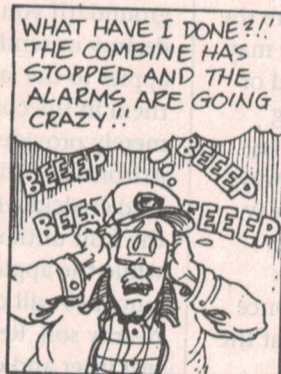
**If you see apple pests this fall, chances are they'll be around next spring unless you do something about it.**



# PEANUTS Classics



# RURAL ROOTZ



# For BETTER or for WORSE



# GARFIELD



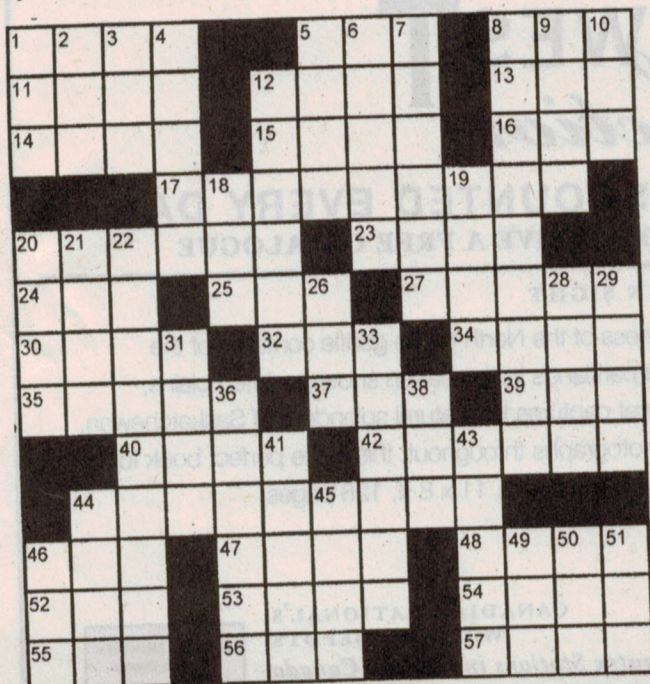
# BETTY





# Canadian Criss Cross

by Walter D. Feener



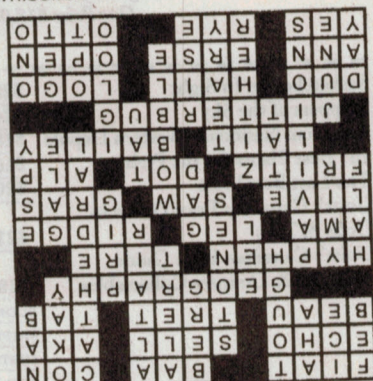
## ACROSS

1. Sanction
5. Goat sound
8. Against
11. Secondary sound
12. Promote successfully
13. Letters preceding an alias
14. "\_\_\_ Geste"
15. Waste allowance
16. Keyboard key
17. Earth science
20. Sign used to join words
23. Wheel covering
24. Physicians' group
25. Pants part
27. Hogback
30. With an audience
32. Cut wood
34. Mardi \_\_\_
35. Violinist Kreisler
37. Decimal point
39. Mont Blanc, for one
40. French milk
42. Noted circus name
44. Forties dance
46. Couple
47. Ice pellets
48. Trademark
52. Ms. Rutledge

53. Gaelic
54. Break the seal
55. Absolutely
56. Nash's birthplace
57. 00 of the early Raiders

## DOWN

1. Aquarius' mo.
2. Slippery stuff
3. Exclamation of discovery
4. Hard to chew
5. "Wozzeck" composer
6. All eyes and ears
7. Aquila star
8. Principal church in a diocese
9. All right
10. Catch a felon
12. Catapult missiles
18. Moray
19. Moralistic person
20. Fifty percent
21. First giant
22. Ornate tents
26. Zilpah's son
28. Nautical storm
29. Make out
31. Raison d'\_\_\_
33. Shake like jelly
36. Psalter relative
38. Greek letter
41. Crying
43. Winter home
44. Actress Allyson
45. Ascend
46. "Pillow Talk" actress
49. Make a decision
50. Purchase
51. Lennon's wife



# MAILBOX

Listings are free but only run once. Please be brief. Issues are prepared three weeks in advance of publication date. Send info to: Mailbox, Western People, Box 2500, Saskatoon S7N 2C4.

**Lomond** and district history book, 919 pages, \$25 plus \$6 shipping or two books for \$45. Make cheque payable to Lomond Drop-In, Box 53, Lomond, Alta. TOL 1G0.

**Wanted:** Embroidery transfer patterns for pillowcases, mainly cross stitch. — A. Reimer, Box 178, Herbert, Sask. SOH 2A0, 306-784-2458.

**Wanted:** Information on William John Ray and Elsie Maude Exler. They were married in New Zealand in 1913 and soon after came to Canada. Their children, Exler Ray and Blodwin Ray, were probably born here. Please send any information to: Margaret Jenkin, 117 Sullivan Ave., Christchurch 2002, New Zealand.

**Looking** for information on the sisters of Bessie Eulalie McKay, who was born September 30, c. 1897, in Neepawa, Man.: twin Frances Luella, Emma Dolba, Annie, Mary and Jane. Please contact Kira Olfert, 14-720 Main St. E., Saskatoon, Sask. S7H 0K1, e-mail: ctk125@mail.usask.ca.

**Wanted:** Words to song that goes "I'm having day dreams in the middle of the afternoon." Mail to: 309 - 35 Victoria Ave. E., Brandon, Man. R7A 1Y7.

**Would** the lady from Fort Qu'Appelle who has the parts for a Kenmore C877-782 sewing machine please call Lois, 306-375-2884. Didn't get phone number.

**Wanted:** Address to send doll in need of restoration. — Thelma Bullick, Box 513, Coronation, Alta. TOC 1C0.

**Wanted:** Words to poem beginning: Under the spreading chestnut tree, The village smithy stands. — Marion Liknes, Box 53, Consort, Alta. TOC 1B0.

**Wanted:** Song, Grama left her fortune in her old armchair. Gladly pay for paper and postage. — Mrs. M. Cook, Box 177, Moosehorn, Man. ROC 2E0.

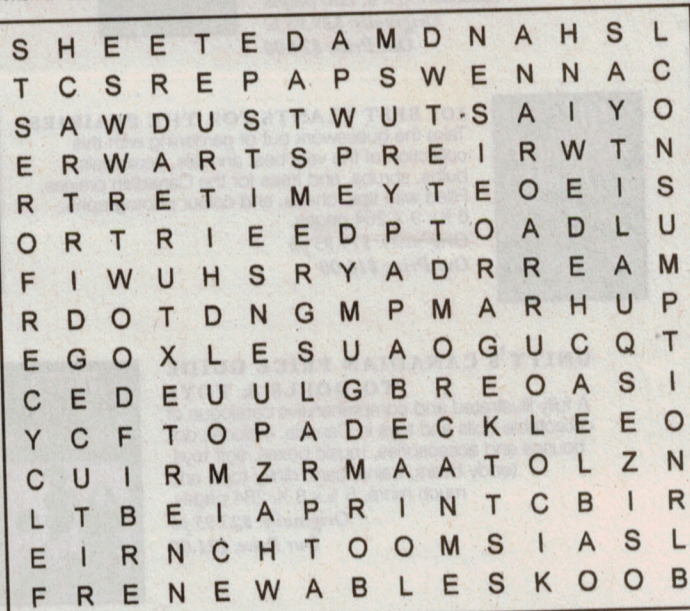
**Wanted:** Someone who could translate a page of Swedish for a family history book. If able will mail page. Write: Donne Seymour, Box 84, Stewart Valley, Sask. SON 2P0.

**Tompkins** Trials and Triumphs 2000 — History of Tompkins trading area. Has family histories, local history, wedding album, prairie women, school districts, memory album and rural roots sections. 650 pages, 800 photos, \$65 plus \$6 mailing. Cheques payable to: Tompkins History Book, Box 186, Tompkins, Sask. SON 2S0. For more information call 306-622-2103.

## PAPER

Word Find puzzle  
by Janice M. Peterson

When all the words in the list have been found, the letters left over will spell the solution.



Bleached  
Books  
Cardboard  
Cartridge  
Colour  
Consumption  
Cut  
Deckle  
Dyes  
Egyptians  
Fibrous Material  
Forest

Handmade  
Hemp  
Magazine  
Mould  
Newspapers  
Papyrus  
Print  
Quality  
Recycle  
Renewable  
Sawdust  
Sheet

Sizes  
Smooth  
Straw  
Tear  
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Trace  
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Solution  
(15 letters):

Writing  
material

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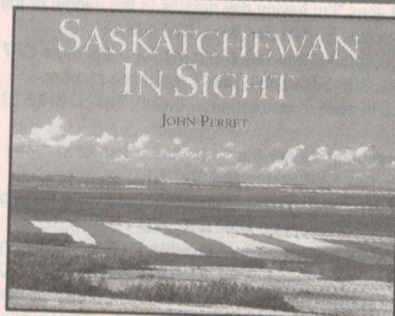


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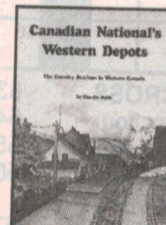


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